

"Well Connected"

Text: Ephesians 2:4-10

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in your Savior Jesus Christ, and may you also be given the wisdom to recognize and the gratitude to appreciate all that your God continues to do for you, day in and day out, moment by moment, and into eternity. Amen.

Dear Fellow Redeemed in Jesus Christ:

When you read the title for this morning's sermon (*Well Connected*) I'm guessing you would envision someone who has prominent or powerful friends – "friend in high places." We tend to value that sort of thing because of what powerful people can do for us. This morning we take a little different angle or perspective.

Think back to holding someone's hand when you were little – mom, dad, grandparents, maybe an older sibling – and how *connected* that made you feel. There was a simple sense of security when someone bigger, older, stronger, wiser held your hand. Whether or not you actually were, you just felt safer and less apprehensive. Now that you are older you probably find yourself on the other end of that relationship. Little ones now hold onto *your* hand because you are the one that they trust; you are the one that gives them a sense of security or comfort. There's just something comforting about being connected in that way.

Now transition again to a more spiritual level and imagine yourself connected like that to your Savior-God. Imagine reaching out whenever you are scared or sad or depressed and feeling the Savior's touch. Wouldn't it be great to be able to let Jesus be in charge? To let Jesus be the one to make the decisions, knowing he will always do what is right – to the point that all you would have to do to feel calm and safe is to follow where he leads? The fact is you *are* well connected right now. Jesus himself promised never to leave or forsake you. Before he left earth to return to heaven he promised to be with us until the end of time as we know it.

As remarkable and comforting as that is meant to be, there is even greater comfort in knowing that Jesus *wants* to be connected like that to you. It is Jesus himself who wants you by his side, Jesus who reaches his hand out to you in his Word. More than even that, he wants you to spend eternity with him in the mansions he has gone to prepare. He wants you with him in eternity. What an amazing realization.

We read of the desire that our Savior has to be connected with us in our text for this morning. While all Scripture qualifies as magnificent, these words this morning hold a special place in the hearts of many Christians because of their clear and simple proclamation of the gospel and of our God's incredible love. Our text is found in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, the 2nd Chapter:

ESV Ephesians 2:4-10 *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

These are the verbally inspired words gifted by God to all of mankind. We hold these words in such high regard both for the spiritual life that they create and sustain in the hearts of unworthy sinners, and for the untold sorrow and misery that they prevent. That God would richly bless each of us through these sacred words this morning, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Permit a rather random question that we will connect in due time to this morning's theme. If you've ever watched one of those ridiculous zombie movies, did you ever wonder if the walking dead realized that they were dead? Although both the movies and the thought behind them are silly and pointless, not so with the true "walking dead" we encounter every day, all around us. *They* have no idea they are dead. They can certainly know that *we* regard them as spiritually dead apart from Jesus Christ, but they dismiss our opinions as nutty. Since they don't *feel* dead, their natural conclusion is that we must be delusional. We all have experience in this area, by the way, since all of us were born spiritually dead. It's just that some of us were too young to remember when it all changed. The point here is that our text makes it clear that you and I were *rescued* – in the true sense of the word – because we were saved at a time when we were spiritually dead, and therefore powerless to help ourselves. We were saved when we neither knew nor cared that we were disconnected from our God, and therefore dead men walking.

We hear this fact rather often, but it is really in learning to appreciate this reality that the gospel truly fills us with the sense of relief that it should. In fact it is a general statement of truth that if you hear a proclamation of the gospel and it doesn't fill you with a sense of comfort, escape, and/or release, you are probably not really thinking about it as you should. Part of the problem is that Christians now view the world through much different eyes compared to how we once existed. Once we viewed the world through our eyes of death and ignorance. Now we see and understand things that were once hidden from us. Our whole understanding of reality and the way we think and feel has been altered so profoundly that it is difficult, if not impossible, for us to appreciate how helpless we were apart from Jesus.

Our text says simply, **"Even when we were dead in trespasses, (God) made us alive together with Christ..."** Our problem was immeasurably compounded by the fact that we neither knew nor cared that we were spiritually dead – walking carelessly to our eternal destruction. We were so captivated by sin and the world around us that we neither knew nor cared about either the death that was in us or the fate that awaited us. The godless might well hear the warnings of Christians about the Day of Judgment, but in their eyes every Christian is a spiritual Chicken Little and every warning is just another silly prediction that the sky is falling.

This understanding of the way things used to be gives us a little better understanding of, and appreciation for, the conversion that has been worked in our hearts by God the Holy Spirit. It also helps us to appreciate just how foolish it is to imagine that at our conversion we were anything other than recipients of a gift. How silly – how insulting to the Holy Spirit – to imagine that we could have "decided for Christ" while we were in such a state of spiritual death. Our text rules out any such possibility with words that rank among the clearest of all gospel presentations: **"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."**

Why did God do such a thing? Why, when we rightly acknowledge that there was nothing good or worthy in any human being, did God send his Son Jesus to secure our rescue? Our text answers clearly: **"God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us... made us alive together with Christ."** Our rescue stands as an unalterable testimony to the love and mercy of our God. Do not fail to apply this simple truth to yourself. Take it personally, for herein is revealed the love of your God for you, personally. God the Father sent his Son, and then called you to saving faith in that Son as your Savior, because he

loved you, and because he determined from all eternity to have mercy on you by rescuing you. God's grace not only brings the dead to life, it also demonstrates his mercy toward those who in no way have earned such mercy.

And yet there is more in this treasured text. Our text also teaches us that God's grace enables our participation with, *our connection to*, Jesus Christ. Our text put it this way: **"God... raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ... For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."** We look now more closely at these words in an effort to learn what it means that our rescue by our God *"connects us to Christ."*

Having been brought to faith, we are now alive and seated with Christ **"in the heavenly places."** Paul emphasizes this truth, this connection to Christ, five different times in this Letter to the Church in Ephesus. His point is that Christians are joined to Christ their Lord in all ways. Not just connected, *well connected*. Paul assures us that we are connected to him in his death, connected to him in his resurrection (**"raised us up with him"**), and connected to him in his subsequent glory in heaven (**"seated us with him in the heavenly places"**). How can we simple, sinful human beings comprehend such things? Why would God desire to give such gifts to sinners like us? Why would God in heaven choose to be connected for all eternity to *us*? Permit a story from ancient Rome by way of explanation.

In a day and age when one's standing in society was gauged primarily by outward trappings like clothes and jewels (not so different from today) the story is told of a matron of high standing in the ancient city of Rome who attended an important social event in plain dress and without adornment – something that was startlingly uncharacteristic for her. When asked by another guest, *"Where are your jewels?"* the woman pointed to her two sons and replied simply, *"Those are my jewels."*

Don't miss the parallel in our text. We here learn that if God were to be asked such a question in heaven, he would point to you and me and to the rest of the rescued sinners in heaven and proclaim, *"There are my jewels, because there is the evidence of the nature and richness of my undeserved love."* Our text affirms this truth when we are told that our God saved us **"so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ**

Jesus.” In other words, God can and will use us in heaven as the bright, shining examples of his grace, his undeserved love and mercy toward those who were in no way deserving or worthy.

Does this suddenly give you pause? It does me. Do you think of yourself as the kind of Christian that could be used by God as an example? What would your qualifications have to include to hold such a position? The logical, worldly side of me makes me think that I would have to prove worthy. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our sole qualification is that we were in every way *unworthy*. God would not point to those who needed no Savior as examples of his *undeserved* love and mercy. He would not point to those who needed no rescue as shining evidence of his benevolence and generosity. It is wretched sinners like you and me that prove his love and mercy.

How does all of this affect our individual lives going forward? Go back to that Roman woman and her sons. Suppose you were one of those sons. How would you regard your own actions going forward, knowing that you were being held up as an example of a parent's greatest earthly wealth and adornment? Obviously any person of character would take such a role very seriously and make every effort to walk worthy of such trust.

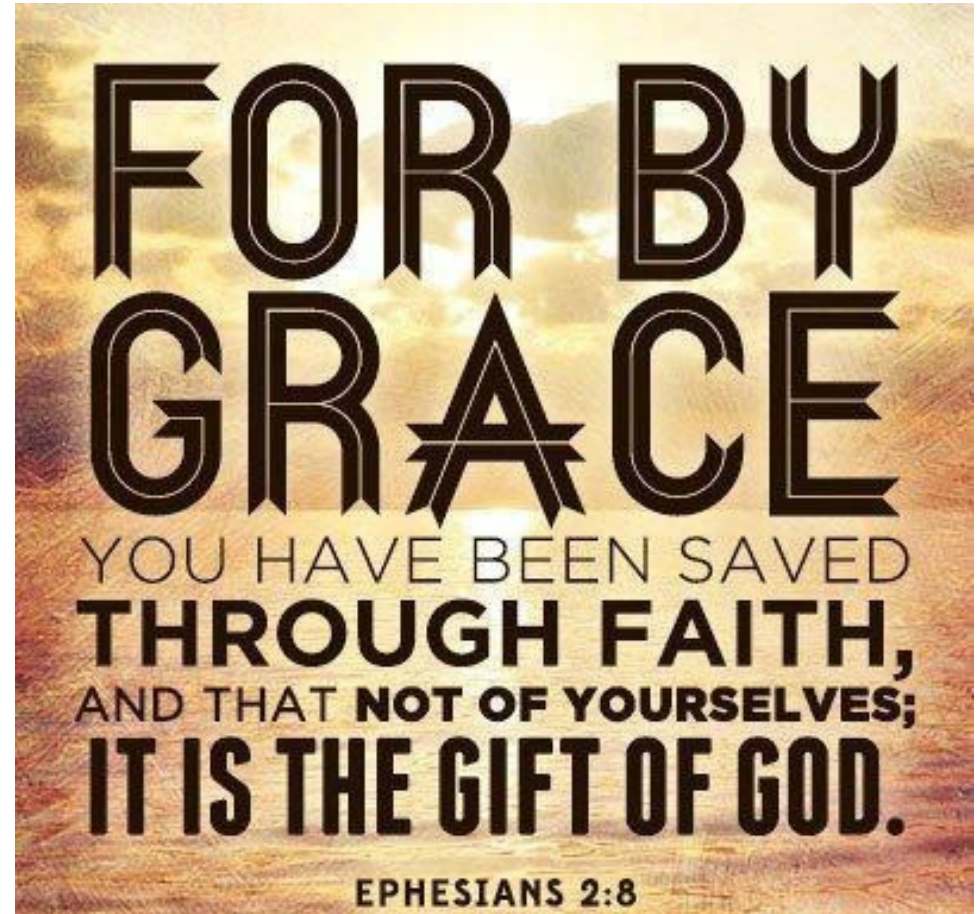
How much more then with God? That new man in you takes great delight in living in and fulfilling such a role. Not so your sinful flesh, which wants anything *but* such loving obedience. Recognize then the high calling that is yours, together with the role that goes hand in hand with such a calling. Our text reminds us of this with these words: ***“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”*** Your heavenly Father takes great delight in your acts of obedience and love. That is not how we earn his love, since our text makes clear that we possess God's love and forgiveness as a gift given to the undeserving because of the actions of Jesus Christ, his Son. Conforming our lives to his will is how Christians say thank you.

So also later in this same chapter Paul writes: ***“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.”*** (Ephesians 2:19) Thanks be to God for the life that he created and sustains in us, and for the work he has given us to do as his beloved children and heirs. Walk worthy of your calling as well-connected children of God – as those God wants by his side in heaven for all eternity. And don't forget that this connection allows you to speak to him at any time, and for any reason, and to know with certainty that he hears you. We could be connected to no better friend. Amen.

^{ESV} **Numbers 21:4-9** From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. ⁵ And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." ⁶ Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. ⁷ And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸ And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." ⁹ So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

^{ESV} **John 3:14-21** And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ ¶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

^{ESV} **Ephesians 2:4-10** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.



ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mark Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist
Michael Roehl, Pastor

The Fourth Sunday in Lent – March 14, 2021

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 7 (Red Hymnal)

"As We Begin Another Week"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Numbers 21:4-9) This reading tells of the bronze serpent made by Moses during the days of Israel's wandering. It ought to be readily apparent to us that since just looking at a bronze statue does not provide medical treatment for a problem, so also the solution to Israel's problem was spiritual rather than physical. It is also clear to Christians that the statue was intended to be a type of Christ. Those who in faith look to Christ, who also hung on a tree, will be saved.

Psalm 91 (Supplement page 33)

The Second Lesson: (John 3:14-21) Jesus himself here teaches us that the true cure for our sin problem is looking in faith to Him alone as our Substitute. It is a profound and damning error to imagine that anything like our own good works or actions could ever substitute for Jesus' perfection. Those in whom the Holy Spirit has worked saving faith will naturally do good works, but such works flow naturally from justified believers.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 44 (Red Hymnal)

"Ye Land, to the Lord, Make a Jubilant Noise"

The Sermon – Text: Ephesians 2:4-10 (Printed on the back page)

"Well Connected"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 304 (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"An Awe-full Mystery Is Here"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 48 (Red Hymnal)

"How Blessed Are They Who Hear God's Word"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!
To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (30) Average (30) Wednesday (22)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-7:30 p.m.	– ILC Tour Choir Concert in Jamestown
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:15 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting

Choir Concert – The ILC Tour Choir is scheduled to perform a concert this evening at 7:30 pm in Jamestown. Please let Pastor Roehl know if you plan to attend or would like to attend but need a ride.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet next Sunday during the fellowship hour. One agenda item will be whether or not to hold our annual Men's Breakfast on Easter Sunday morning. If you have thoughts on this, please share them with a Council member before the meeting.

Midweek Services – Our midweek Lenten services continue this week with a study of the virtue of *faithfulness*.

Looking Ahead – Our Holy Week schedule includes a Communion Service on Maundy Thursday, April 1, and Good Friday service on April 2. Both services are scheduled to start at 7pm.